

HOOKEDNOW

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THANK YOU FOR SUBSCRIBING TO *HOOKEDNOW* the online e-zine for fly fishers. Welcome to the April-May issue. Our goal is to entertain and educate with a combination of text, photos, and video. Feel free to contact us if you have any questions or comments at: sweltsa@frontier.com (please include "HookedNow" in the subject line for quicker replies). We also hope you will tell your fishing buddies about HookedNow.

In this, the April-May issue, we discuss how to improve your nymph fishing success. Spring is a time of mixed conditions with good hatches combined with high, cold water. When fish aren't taking at the surface don't be afraid to tie on a nymph.

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Photo by Rick Hafele

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SKIP MORRIS – NYMPH FISHING VARIATIONS



Photo by Rick Hafele

Refining your technique in nymph fishing is valuable indeed, but I'll let Dave and Rick help you with that while I veer off slightly on another important topic:

how nymph fishing can and sometimes must vary from one river or fishing situation to another.

The obvious starting point is depth of the fly--the standard word we hear again and again is that the nymph must be skimming the riverbed if it's going to catch trout. Guess what?--the standard word is right. At least it's right in my experience; I normally do try to get my nymphs down almost on and occasionally bumping the bottom. But there are exceptions...

One northwest river I fish swings through all sorts of water from dead to rushing, pools to pockets to riffles--the normal range--but that river also offers some unusual stretches that used to give me grief: clusters of small boulders in streamy waist-deep flows that look really promising for the nymph. I'd set the depth of my indicator with care, fish my rig with vigilance, and hook few trout but one boulder after another. Losing a nymph now and then is just part of good nymph fishing, but I was running through flies at an alarming rate.

Truth is, I couldn't even consider the solution until a guide in a fly shop told me, "We gave up on trying to get the fly down in those

boulders. We keep the fly up higher so it skims the tops of the rocks. We might not catch as many fish, but we sure spend a lot less time tying on new flies." The answer had taunted me before then and I'd ignored it; that's how dedicated I was to the deep nymph, to an idea.

Blind dedication to anything in fishing costs you fish and arrests your growth as an angler--and that's a concept I actually do try to follow without question. To deal effectively with the ever-new challenges of fishing, you need to keep your options, and your mind, wide open.



Photo by Rick Hafele

Last summer, I drifted deep nymphs through a section of Montana meadow stream that was really a slow-moving canal--no features, no significant variation--to hook large brown trout (most of which somehow spat the hook...but not all of them). It was a little different than anywhere I'd fished a nymph before, and so I delighted in it. Such surprises in my fishing are often what I remember most happily and vividly in the years that follow. I tried a little Czech nymphing and even a very slow retrieve with no indicator in the lazy deep flow, but in the end I found standard

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indicator fishing the best solution. There was just enough current to make it work. So I faced new water and experimented, even though the old standard approach won out. It could have gone entirely differently. I might have found the fish refusing a drifting nymph and quick to gobble one swimming on a slow retrieve. You never know until you experiment.

Not so long ago I broke my familiar pattern--experimented, that is--while fishing a nymph and was well rewarded for it. It happened on a nearby stream that in late summer rates hardly more than a creek, and I've always approached it as a creek, but it had been a really wet spring and summer, and in late July when the stream should have been in fine shape, it was lapping at the trees along its banks and churning with a white translucence. I walked up to a pool I knew well and was surprised to see an abundance of water rushing through it. I put up a heavy nymph and drifted it through. By the time I'd worked up through all the good water I landed three small trout. I knew the pool held plenty of trout, so I clamped a good-size split onto my tippet and worked the fly through again. This time I landed a half dozen trout. I decided then to see how far I could take the thing and clamped on yet another split shot that was even larger than the first one. I'd *never* considered adding *any* split in this peaceful little stream before and felt strange doing it, about the way you'd feel taking an 8-weight rod to a bluegill pond. But I went ahead. This time I hooked several more trout, and one was a dandy, eleven inches long--when your hungry local trout range from six to eight inches, eleven inches seems...gargantuan! I was, as on the Montana river, delighted. The point is, I knew the



Photo by Rick Hafele

water, I knew what worked there and had worked there for years, and yet when the stream was in a mood I tried something that seemed a little crazy (even if it wasn't crazy at all on other rivers) and hooked fish I wouldn't have otherwise hooked.

Now I find myself having made not one point but two: 1. fish with an open mind and it'll often pay off, and 2. the element of fly fishing that holds our attention year after year really isn't the complexity of hatches or the superabundance of interesting fly patterns or even the thrill of a good fish leaping and stealing line--it's the variations and discoveries, the surprises.



Photo by Rick Hafele

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Getting back to the rule about bumping the riverbed with your nymphs, the hopper-dropper rig has really challenged that. A big buoyant dry fly--often a grasshopper imitation--suspends a small heavy nymph from a couple of feet of tippet tied to the bend of the big dry fly's hook. There's no question it works. All you need are trout willing to move up for nymphs not far below the surface of the water. The success of this setup convinced me there were far more such trout than I'd suspected while adhering so long to my nymph-on-the-bottom philosophy. There it is again, the value of an open mind and experimentation. I'll try to stop hammering on that point from now on (though it deserved a good hammering).

I also fish the nymph well up from the bottom when I fish creeks, usually. It depends on the creek and the conditions. Most creeks contain hungry trout happy to meet a nymph halfway. So I fish a weighted nymph down just a foot or foot-and-a-half under the indicator and rarely snag the bottom. But if creek trout are in a mood, I'll drop the nymph right down to them (and ever since my experience on my swollen little local creek-river when I caught that monster by adding weight to my tippet, I'm wide open to a split shot or even two if I think it might help).

Frankly, though, I still believe successful nymph fishing normally depends on getting the nymph down where the trout normally hold, down along the riverbed where the current is broken and therefore slowest, down where most predators are out of range. But if a hopper-dropper works better than my standard approach, and sometimes it does, I'll switch in a blink. As I said about experimentation...oops!

My standard rig for river nymph fishing, by the way, is pretty much *the* standard approach: tapered leader, longish tippet, heavy fly on the point of the tippet, indicator up the leader about twice the depth of the water, split shot or other weight on the tippet or leader up from the fly if necessary. It's become the standard method because it works, consistently, about everywhere. I've used it all over the US--in charging western rivers and lazy spring creeks and southern tailwaters and Midwest streams, and more--and in Canada and Europe.

Fifteen or twenty years ago the loop knot in nymph fishing was a rarity, but no longer--the mono loop knot is now standard in fishing river nymphs. It really lets the fly dance in the currents. Learn it and use it. Simple.



Photo by Skip Morris

Long-distance nymph fishing isn't so unusual as it once was either, but many still avoid it. I picked up the habit naturally from nymph fishing the massive Lower Deschutes River in Oregon--you really can't reach some of the best nymph water in that river with short-cast nymph fishing. In many rivers, I find, from the Yakima in

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A tight loop like this looks pretty and is great when fishing dry flies, but definitely not what you want when casting a weighted nymph rig. Practice casting open loops at home, so you'll be ready on the stream and avoid the frustration of tangled leaders.



Photo by Rick Hafele

Washington to the South Platte in Colorado to just about every substantial trout river I've fished, the long-distance nymph belongs in the nymph fisher's arsenal and sometimes pays off handsomely. The trick to distance nymphing really isn't in the fly or rig or even so much in the strike (although you sure have to be on your toes to set the hook quickly enough with the indicator out there fifty feet); it's in the cast. The danger that keeps many from casting a nymph out very far is the tangles that can come with a weighted fly and weight on the leader and a strike indicator all bouncing around in the air. The solution is largely to keep all this stuff away from the line by keeping both sides of the casting loop well separated. This means making those wide loops we're often told are so inefficient and hurt our distance. Tight loops are fine for dry flies and emerger flies, but not for nymph fishing. So open your loops. Drop the rod-tip back and forward further than usual. A wide

loop can go out fifty feet, and it's the only way it'll go out that far without a tangle.

And take your time. Really smoothing out your strokes and lengthening them--a long, gradual acceleration rather than the dry-fly flick--will help you avoid snarling all that junk on your leader.

The wide loop and smooth elongated stroke free you up to push the nymph out there into all that promising water you can't reach with a short lob.

But this sort of casting and nymph fishing does take practice. So, practice. Reach a little further now and then as you absorb the principles of casting I've described, cover more water, catch more trout...

The opposite to all this of course is Czech nymphing, with the fly under the rod's tip, so close to your boots you'd never think a trout would stand for it. But with a quiet approach by the

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angler, trout do stand for it, in the right places, and the method does provide excellent strike sensitivity for the angler. It's a simple idea: a very heavy fly on the point, a lightweight dropper or two riding above that (technically, the heavy fly is one of the droppers, but it ends up on the bottom anyway), the angler moving the rod-tip downstream slightly faster than the current to keep tension on the rig, no indicator. Czech and other close-in nymphing techniques have their place. All the standard variations do, really.

Strike indicator designs have always been under debate. I've tried nearly all of them. Some indicators lock onto a loop of the leader, but leave the leader coiled or kinked--when you have to run the fly deeper you move the indicator up so the coil or kink is now between the indicator and fly, acting as a dampener to the indicator's critical work. That's why I normally avoid these indicators. Some indicators really stick to the leader, which is good when you want them to stay in place but bad when you want to move them. So I've come back around to the old "corkie," a brightly panted little cork ball, with a hole down its center, originally made as a steelhead lure. It's strung up the leader and locked in place with half a toothpick shoved in the hole tight against the leader. It stays in place and floats forever and it's a cinch to see out there. It's served me honorably for decades. I'm waiting, however, for a glowing little bubble called a Thing-a-ma-bobber to come out with a system for attachment that doesn't kink the my leader. The Thing-a-ma-bobber is very light and sensitive. It has developed a legion of fans.

The standard two-nymph system used to be the dropper system, but that's changed. Now it's the setup with a small nymph trailing off tippet

tied to the bend of a big heavily weighted nymph. This new method works, but I'm convinced it won't out because it's not nearly so prone to tangles as



Photo by Rick Hafele

Simple yet effective, a corkie held in place with a toothpick is still one of the best indicators you can use.

the dropper. I use both, but still prefer the dropper system. I've watched a heavy nymph bounce along the bottom in clear water and ideal light as the dropper fly shuddered and swam against the current--the dropper fly looked alive and enticing. It's been a deadly rig for me (when I wasn't busy chopping apart a little snarl of tippet).

So you have to cast with exceptional care and concentration with a dropper system--smooth strokes mean everything, and wide casting loops are critical. Don't get distracted from your casting for even a blink or everything will jump together in a tangle.

Keeping the tippet for the dropper fly short really helps avoid trouble. Just a five or six inches of tippet should do it. A foot of tippet for a dropper is begging for tangles, and it's unnecessary.

I like to attach the dropper tippet with a clinch knot just above a stopper knot (such as the

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figure eight knot) only about eight or ten inches above the heavy point fly; this keeps the dropper fly down near the riverbed. Two dropper flies *really* demand careful casting.

The dropper system isn't so far from Czech nymphing then, since both involve one or two dropper-flies. But the lob that substitutes for a cast in the Czech style helps avoid tangles in its long dropper tippets. A Czech rig really cast out with an

indicator could be a nightmare. So, despite the long sections of tippet that connect droppers in Czech nymphing, keep your dropper-fly tippets short for standard dropper nymph fishing with an indicator.

So, there are some ideas that will keep you busy for some time with your nymph fishing. Here are some proven nymphs you can tie on as you experiment with these new ideas.



Photo by Skip Morris

MORRISTONE (far left fly)

Skip Morris - Tied by Skip Morris

Hook: Heavy wire, 3X or 4X long (a slow-curve shank is optional), sizes 10 to 6.

Thread: Brown 8/0, 6/0 or 3/0.

Weight: Lead or lead-substitute wire (I like to add a short second layer of finer wire in the thorax-area).

Tail: A mottled-brown hen-saddle tip, the center trimmed out.

Rib: Dark-brown or brown medium-diameter premade rib material--V-rib, Larva Lace...

Body: Dark-gray woven yarn (usually wool or fuzzy Antron. Your local fly shop probably carries such yarn, but if not, you'll find lots of choices at a yarn shop or fabric store); chenille or vernille is a good substitute.

Wing-Case: Pheasant-tail fibers, dark-side showing.

Legs: Brown-mottled hen-saddle hackle, flat. Use one feather for both tail and legs, the tip for the tail and the rest for the legs. Trimming slots in the fibers to leave six legs is optional.

Head: Dark-brown dubbing (dyed rabbit is good).

Comments: Imitates both the salmonfly nymph and darker golden-stone nymphs--easy to tie once you get used to its unconventional construction.

After you bind on the feather-tip tail, bind on the rib and yarn behind the lead, bind on the wing-case fibers and the body of the hen-saddle feather over them, pull the wing-case fibers and hen forward and bind them temporarily, wind the yarn to the wing case and hen, unwind the thread holding the wing case and hen, and wind the yarn to the hook's eye

or the bead. Follow this same procedure for winding the rib. Pull forward the leg-feather and bind it at the hook's eye, do the same with the pheasant fibers for the wing case.

With plenty of weight under the yarn--and especially with the added weight of a metal bead for a head--the Morrystone has often been my point fly in a dropper system.

FLASHBACK PHEASANT TAIL (middle fly)

Tied by Skip Morris

Hook: Heavy wire, regular shank or 1X long, sizes 20 to 10.

Thread: Brown 8/0 or 6/0.

Tail: Pheasant-tail fibers.

Rib: Fine copper wire.

Back and Top of Wing-Case: Pearl Flashabou strands.

Abdomen: Pheasant-tail fibers.

Wing-Case and Legs: Pheasant-tail fibers.

Thorax: Peacock herl.

Comments: The bead-head version of the Flashback Pheasant Tail is very popular, but the unweighted Flashback Pheasant Tail really dances as a dropper fly.

BURK'S BOTTOM ROLLER, HARE'S EAR SPECIAL (far right fly)

Andy Burke - tied by Skip Morris

Hook: Heavy wire, humped shank, size 14 to 6.

Bead: Gold tungsten.

Weight: Lead or lead-substitute wire.

Thread: Beige (or tan) 6/0.

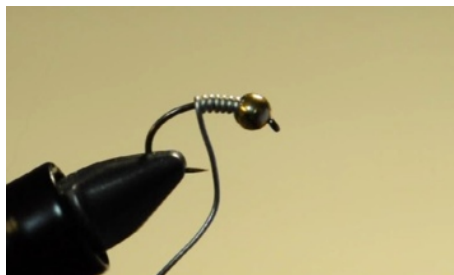
Back: A strip of Mother of Pearl Sili Skin (or another pearl or clear sheeting--Stretch Flex, Scud Back, Thin Skin...). The back goes over the top of the bead. Run a dark-brown permanent waterproof marking pen up the back after the fly is completed.

Rib: Tippet, 5X. The rib goes up the body, directly behind the bead, and then *across* the top of the bead and back-material bead to be bound at the eye under a thread head.

Body: Arizona Synthetic Peacock dubbing in both Light Hare's Ear and Dark Hare's Ear, blended (or any coarse, shiny, tan/brown dubbing--SLF Dubbing, Antron...).

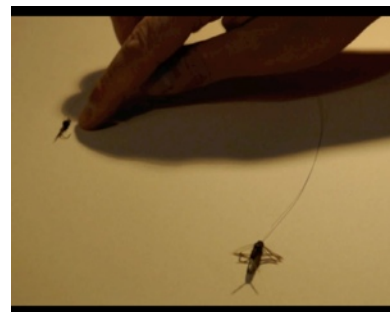
Comments: Most weighted flies designed to pull the Czech nymph rig down are European designs. But American Andy Burk's Bottom Roller series has really caught on in the states.

Video Clips by Skip



[CLICK HERE](#)

To watch Skip show you the best way to add lead wire to a bead-head nymph.



[CLICK HERE](#)

To watch Skip discuss his favorite dropper rig for nymph fishing.

DAVE HUGHES – NYMPH FISHING SIMPLIFIED



Photo by Rick Hafele

Nymph fishing can seem to be an intricate, sometimes almost unsolvable, puzzle. Three out of three of your Hooked Now authors have written books about the subject. But it's no secret

that nymphing can be boiled down to a rare few simplicities, and once you've gotten it so reduced, you'll be armed to solve almost all of nymph fishing's wide array of situations. You'll also be less burdened, both mentally and physically, and therefore certain to have more fun fishing. It is a secret that when you reduce nymphing strategies down to their core, you're probably going to suffer the unfortunate fate of those who catch more trout: prune hand syndrome from releasing them all. Sorry.

Successful nymph fishing for trout has just three elemental parts: *the right fly*; *the right rig*; and *the right method*. Once you put those together, in that order of construction, you'll have the nymph fishing puzzle pretty well solved. It should be no surprise that a few basic flies, rigged in a minimum number of ways, and presented with a few core methods, will--and in fact *do*--fool most nymph-caught trout.

The right fly -

If you added up the fly patterns listed in just our own three books, it might be a few hundred. If you felt compelled to consider all nymph patterns that have ever been invented, it would goose the count to a few thousands. Don't do that. Find yourself a core set of six to a dozen patterns that are varied in terms of size and color, and that cover the most common trout food forms, and you'll have most of the nymphs you'll ever need.

How do you choose those few? First, look at the flies you already carry, and choose from them the essential ones in which you have the most faith, and on which you catch the most trout. Start with those. If you're like me, they'll include the Copper John, Lightning Bug, Pink Squirrel, and Beadhead Prince. Most likely, you're not like me, and your list will be different. That's fine; it's far better that you fish with your own favorites than with mine, because you've already got confidence in them.

Photo by Dave Hughes



Set up a fly box of your favorite nymph patterns in a range of sizes. With this in your vest you'll be ready for most nymph fishing situations.

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Second, be sure you have patterns that cover those few things trout make most of their living eating: salmon flies, BWO, PMD, and green drake mayfly nymphs, green rock worms, black midge pupae, and aquatic earth worms. If you were to peer into my nymph box, Rick's nymph box, and Skip's nymph box, you would see very few specific patterns that overlap. But you would be certain to find a dressing that specifically covers each of the major food forms of moving-water trout.

Third, if you fish lakes and ponds to any extent at all, then go out and buy a separate nymph box specifically for stillwater patterns. Why? Because stillwater food forms are different, for the most part, from those found in streams, and your nymph set for moving water won't prepare you very well to fish lakes. In this box you want imitations of midge pupae, scuds, leeches, water boatmen, damselflies, dragonflies, and stillwater mayflies: *Callibaetis*. Again, the list should be minimal; your fly selection simple.

That's the key to choosing the right fly: carry a simple set of nymphs, in each of which you can place complete confidence, and select the one--or more often two--that you feel trout will be most willing to take, given the conditions of the moment.

The right rig -

I wrote a book about rigs for trout (*which is also listed in the bibliography, and which you also should buy*). In it I reveal a great number of ways to construct your terminal tackle for nymph fishing. You won't be hurt by knowing all the different

ways. But you'll catch as many trout if you focus on just the three most common and useful rigs.

The first is simply to tie the nymph to the end of your tippet, as you would a dry fly or wet fly. It's commonly overlooked today, amid all the focus on nymph-and-indicator fishing, that you can still catch a lot of trout by just tying a nymph to the end of your leader, stepping into the water, and fishing it down and around on the swing. This is no different from wet fly fishing, except you're doing it with a nymph--or again, with two of them.



Photo by Rick Hafele

The second useful rig is to tie a nymph, or pair of them, to the end of your tippet, then to fix a strike indicator up the leader from two to six feet. This simple rig lets you fish nymphs upstream, and greatly broadens the number of situations in which you can present them successfully. I use yarn indicators for this rig more often than hard ones. But I have to admit that the last time I fished a medium-sized mountain stream to which I've long had access, I finally got around to collecting in it. I discovered, to my surprise, that it has an overwhelming abundance of salmon fly nymphs. I quickly re-rigged with an appropriate imitation

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suspended on three feet of tippet under a half-inch white Thingamabobber. That thing began to dip and dance.

The dry-and-dropper rig is a variation of the nymph and indicator rig. You're just using a dry fly rather than yarn for an indicator. It has the advantage of offering trout a choice.

The third, and most common, nymph rig is the standard indicator-and-shot setup. This is what we think about when we think about nymphing. It consists of a nymph at the tippet end, and more often a pair of them. I have friends who fish three nymphs, but they're more patient

heavy, use a large hard indicator or Thingamabobber. If they're modest, use a smaller hard indicator or about a half-inch fan of yarn. If they're light, and you're fishing delicate, use a small hard indicator or pea-sized piece of yarn.

Before moving on to methods, I'll mention a couple of bits of advice. First, when you rig with shot, use two of the size you think will get your nymphs to the bottom, rather than a single big one. That way when you need to adjust your rig--which you clearly will when you move from one water depth to another, or from one current speed to another that is slower or faster--you will be able to adjust more easily by either adding or removing a shot. Second, when you fish heavily-pestered water, use a white indicator rather than red or chartreuse. Trout will mistake it as foam, which they see all the time. On crowded trout streams, they see bright strike indicators as often as they see foam, but one spells danger, the other does not.

Photo by Dave Hughes



Indicators and split shot - two essential items in your nymph fishing arsenal.

with tangles than I am. Next up the leader, from eight inches to a foot or more, are one or two split shot. I'm a fan of putty weight, which serves the same purpose. At the top end of the standard rig, from one or one-and-a-half to two times the depth of the water, is the indicator.

Choose your indicator based on the minimum floatation needed to support the weight of the nymphs you've chosen to fish. If they're



Photo by Dave Hughes

When trout are taking nymphs mid-depth or near the surface in gentle currents, simply swinging a nymph downstream with no indicator can produce positive results.

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The right method -

It should be obvious that the right method depends to some extent on the rig chosen.

For the nymph with no indicator or added weight, the most common method is the simple wet fly swing. Step in, cast, mend and tend the drift, usually to slow the fly or flies, let it or them hang for a moment at the end. Take a step downstream, cast again, fish out the swing again. If you feel a take, let the trout set the hook itself. The method is similar to summer steelheading. The hook set is the same as well: yank, and you'll either pull the fly away or break it off. Both are bad outcomes. Be patient.

Another method for the simplest rig is fishing upstream to trout that appear to be rising, but are actually feeding subsurface. Watch for bubbles in the rise-rings; if they're absent, rig with a nymph imitation of whatever is hatching, and cast it upstream to the rises just as you would a dry. Set the hook if you see a rise appear where you suspect your nymph to be drifting.

For the nymph and indicator with no weight, your methods expand out a bit, and are almost all upstream. I use this simple rig most often when fishing small streams on the sorts of days when trout are not interested in dry flies. I simply rig a standard nymph or beadhead on two to three feet of tippet, a yarn indicator dressed well with floatant, and fish it upstream just as I might with a dry fly on the same water. If I were pinned down, I would confess that my fly is almost always a size 14 A. P. Black, and my indicator a half-inch fan of yellow yarn.

Another way to fish the indicator and nymph rig is with three to six feet of fine tippet to

an imitation of the most prevalent insect or crustacean on the stream. This is a fine spring creek and tailwater rig, to be used for fishing subsurface risers and spotted trout. Cast well upstream from them, a distance calculated to get your nymph to the level they're holding. As the nymph sinks to them, and drifts to and past them, split your vision between the nymph and the indicator. If either moves, lift the rod gently to set the hook. If you hit, it's on. If you miss, you don't frighten the trout, and can keep trying.

The most common method for the standard indicator-and-shot rig is Gary Borger's Shotgun Method. It's a way to cover all of the water along the bottom in water where you know trout are likely to hold, but you're unable to pinpoint their precise positions. You want to show the nymph, or nymphs, to all potential holding lies.



Photo by Dave Hughes

Changes in depth and current speed create underwater feeding lanes for trout and should be covered carefully with your nymphs. An upstream cast will get your nymph to the bottom quickly.

Take up a position close to and downstream from the water you want to cover. Make your first cast short and almost straight upstream. Lift your

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rod as the indicator drifts freely toward you. Toss mends as needed to keep your line as straight to the indicator as you can. When it passes your position, feed line, and slowly lower your rod, to keep it drifting downstream as far as you can. When it reaches the end of its tether, don't yank it out of there for the next cast. Let the indicator lift the fly or flies slowly up off the bottom, as if they're natural nymphs heading up top to emerge.

Make your second and subsequent casts a foot or so outboard into the current from the first, at the same distance upstream. Fish each drift parallel along the bottom to the one before it. When you've covered all the water you can from your first position, don't extend your casts upstream. Instead, wade upstream, reposition yourself, and make a similar set of short casts to cover the new reach of bottom. In this manner, you show your nymphs to any trout that might be down there.

Remember to adjust as you move when indicator-and-shot fishing. If the water gets deeper or faster, move your indicator up the leader or add a split shot. If the water gets shallower or slower, move your indicator closer to the weight, or remove a shot. The idea is to keep your nymphs in

the strike zone, on or within four to six inches of the bottom, at all times.

Summary -

Successful nymphing, at its core, consists of solving a simple three-part puzzle: select the right fly, rig it the right way, and present it with the right method. Almost always, the right fly is based on things that trout eat, the right rig is designed to get the fly to the bottom, and the right method is used to fish it--or them!--dead drift down there.

Tie or buy a set of dependable nymphs based around a core half dozen to at most a dozen patterns. Rig in one of three simple ways: without indicator, with indicator, and with indicator-and-shot. Fish with just a handful of methods: on the swing, upstream to feeders, upstream to spotted trout, or upstream to cover all of the water that might hold trout.

After you've mastered these essential flies, rigs, and methods, you'll find an infinity of combinations and permutations to work on them. But those that lie at the core of nymphing will solve the most situations, and catch the most trout for you.

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Dave Hughes:

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Skip Morris:

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Photo by Dave Hughes

RICK HAFELE - NYMPH FISHING NO-NO'S



Photo by Mark Bachmann

Skip and Dave have described a number of excellent approaches to nymph fishing, so I thought I'd focus on what you should avoid. Knowing what not to do can sometimes be even more important than knowing what

you should do. Over the years I've made my share of mistakes and seen others fail at nymph fishing only because of a few simple missteps. Below I describe five simple no-no's that if avoided I believe will greatly improve your nymph fishing success.

#1: Don't be afraid to use small nymph patterns!

For some reason most fly fishers pay close attention to the size of their patterns when fishing dry flies, but routinely grab the largest fly in their fly box when selecting a nymph pattern. It's hard not to. Even after years and years of experience to the contrary, I still have to force myself to select a

Photo by Rick Hafele



While the large stonefly nymph looks tasty to us, the small size 18 mayfly nymph in the middle bottom row is more often what trout are looking for.

size 16 or 18 nymph instead of a size 10 or 12. It just seems to make sense that a trout will one, see a larger nymph easier than a small one, and two, find a larger morsel of food much more enticing than a small morsel. I mean who picks the smallest slice of cake on the dessert tray?

Ah, but trout, if nothing else, are creatures of habit, and when it comes to the size of natural nymphs floating by them, small and smaller is the rule, not the exception. As a result trout see way more small nymphs than large ones, and thus are in the habit of taking tiny morsels of food.

Trout also feed selectively when a specific food item is abundant. We know that's true when fishing dry flies because we see the refusals when our flies are just a little too large. Well, the same selectivity occurs when trout focus their feeding on a really abundant food drifting below the surface. Their refusals of our oversized nymphs, however, go unnoticed and we have no idea our fly has been rejected.



Photo by Dave Hughes

The above stomach contents show that this well-fed trout had eyes only for little blue-winged olive nymphs (size 18) and small Mother's day caddis pupae (size 16).

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Photos by Rick Hafele

Above: Once you have a good collection of naturals in a tray of water, drop your nymph patterns into the water next to them. You'll likely be shocked at how much larger your patterns are than the naturals.

Left: Looking at the insect life in a stream will keep you from fishing for a while, but it usually proves to be time very well spent.

If you don't think small nymphs outnumber large ones, I encourage you to take a few minutes and collect a good sample of nymphs out of a riffle in your favorite trout stream. Put what you collect in a white plastic tray with half an inch of water and look closely at how many different types of nymphs are present. Then look closely at the size of the most numerous ones. Now take one of your favorite nymph patterns for that natural and place it in the tray next to the real thing. I'll bet dollars to donuts your fly is significantly larger than the natural.

I have found over and over again that using nymph patterns that match the size of the dominant natural nymphs present, even if that means using a size 18 or 20 nymph imitation, greatly improves my nymph fishing success.

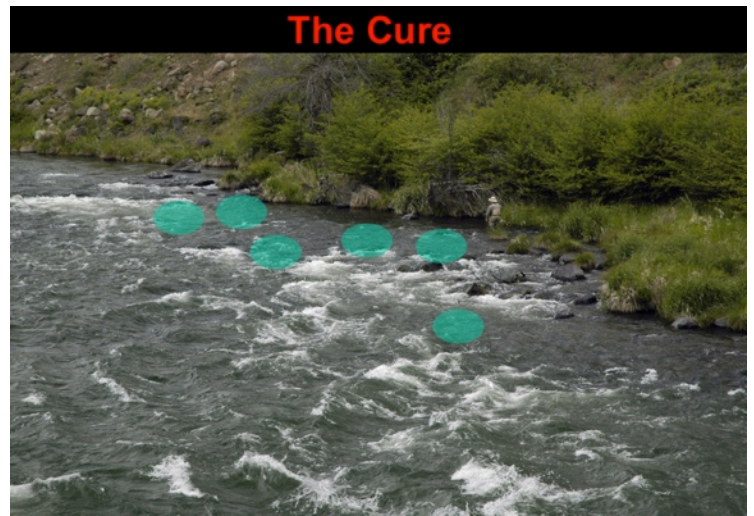
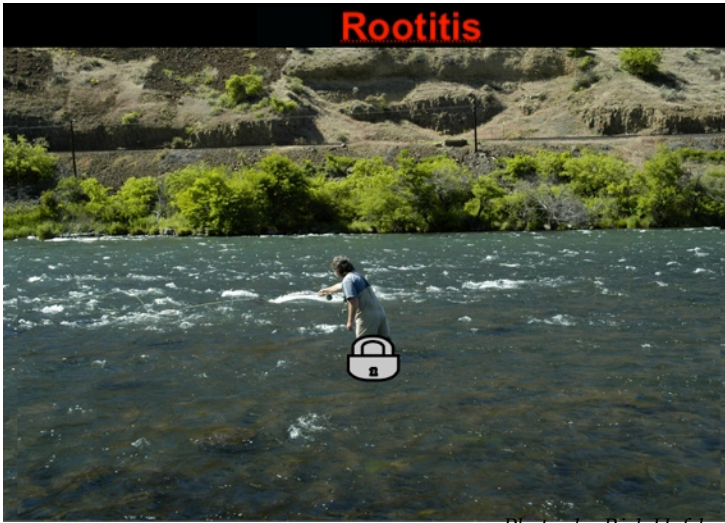
Bottom line: Make sure your nymph selection includes patterns in sizes 16 and smaller, and then **USE THEM.**



Photo by Rick Hafele

[CLICK HERE](#)

To view video of Rick showing size of naturals and patterns for nymph fishing.



Photos by Rick Hafele

With Rootitis (left photo) your legs are locked in one place, but fortunately it is easy to cure. The photo on the right shows several potential holding lies in a section of stream. Fish each area carefully, usually six to eight good casts is sufficient, and then move to the next spot. If you keep looking ahead to the next likely trout lie and keep moving, your rootitis will be cured.

#2: Avoid "Rootitis"

Rootitis is one of the most common afflictions of beginning nymph fishers, and it will seriously limit your success. How do you know if you have rootitis? If you find yourself parked in one spot fishing nymphs for 30, 20, or even ten minutes without getting a strike and not moving, you have rootitis.

Rootitis occurs because the water you're fishing looks really fishy, and maybe you have even taken good fish there before. But one of the secrets to better nymph fishing is making sure your fly gets in front of more fish. Because you can't see exactly where the fish are at - at least not typically - you need to carefully cover a piece of water and then move to another piece. That could be taking just a few steps upstream, or lengthening your cast a few feet to drift your fly in different water, or walking upstream or downstream some distance.

There are no rules about how long is too long. For myself after six to eight good drifts of my nymph through a specific current seam or holding

lie without a strike, I pick another lie to cover with another six to eight casts. By covering water and then moving you are increasing the chances of your fly passing near a fish. Always keep looking for the next fishy spot to cover with you nymphs, and thus avoid rootitis.

#3: Change patterns that aren't working

This problem is sort of like rootitis in that you are continuing to do something that isn't working. With rootitis you are continuing to fish the same water. In this case you are continuing to use the same fly pattern.

We all have favorite flies, go-to patterns, that we put on when we don't have a good reason to choose something specific. These patterns have proven themselves effective time and again, and we fish them with confidence. But don't let the habit of choosing certain flies become a rut. No matter how good a particularly fly pattern might be or how much confidence you have in it, there will be times fish just won't take it.

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Photo by Rick Hafele

If one fly pattern isn't working don't hesitate to change it. But it helps to know what to change it to, so spend a little time observing what trout have to eat both above and below the water.

Like rootitis there are no hard rules about how long you should fish a fly before changing patterns. I've had some fly fishers tell me that if they haven't had a strike in ten minutes they change flies. I generally stick with a pattern longer than that. But if you haven't had any success after an hour's time, it's time for a change. That's when I recommend you put your rod down and spend 20 or 30 minutes looking around and in the stream for clues about what fish might be seeing and eating. Pick up some rocks in a riffle and see what nymphs are crawling around and shake some streamside trees or shrubs to see what adult insects fly out. The time spent looking will help a great deal in deciding exactly what that next fly pattern should be and give you confidence in it when you tie it on. This also gives you a chance to see the naturals up close so you can check their size, and thus avoid no-no #1.

#4: Get your nymphs to the bottom

Skip and Dave both mention the need to fish nymphs deep, which means near the bottom whether you are fishing in water two feet deep or ten. I want to emphasize this even more by saying: If your nymph isn't hanging up on or bumping the bottom at least once every five or six casts, you are not fishing deep enough and need to add more weight to your leader. I don't mean that you should lose a fly every five or six casts, but you should be feeling your fly hit the bottom. Occasionally it will get snagged, and some snags will result in a lost fly. If you want to improve your nymph fishing however, as they say, get use to it!

More than once I've fished a section of stream with nymphs without hardly a strike, and then re-fished the same water after adding one or two more split shot to my rig. The increased success after adding the split shot was surprising. The same water that produced zero fish suddenly produced a half dozen. Remember, ninety percent of the time when fish aren't feeding in or near the surface, get your nymphs to the bottom.

#5: Fish nymphs with as little line as possible

One of the main challenges of nymph fishing is detecting a strike and then setting the hook before the fish spits out your fly. All successful nymph fishing tactics maximize these two factors. No matter what tactic you are using, you will be more effective at detecting a strike and hooking fish if you shorten the amount of line you have on the water.

Strike indicators have gained acceptance and popularity because they make detecting

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strikes much easier. None-the-less it is much easier to see your indicator, and know when a fish has wiggled it, if it is ten feet away instead of thirty. When nymphing without an indicator, high sticking or Czech nymphing for example, you are relying on feel to detect strikes. In this case it is even more important to have as little line as possible on the water. With Czech nymphing there is no fly line on the water.

Once you see or feel a fish strike, a short line will also greatly increase the number of those fish you actually hook. For every foot of additional line you have out beyond your rod tip you are increasing the lag time between seeing or feeling a strike and pulling the fly tight in the fishes mouth once you react. I've watched fish from underwater (a wetsuit, mask and snorkel are great learning tools) suck in an angler's nymph and spit it out so fast I wasn't sure I saw it. After watching the speed at which a trout can spit out a fly, I'm convinced that even the best nymph fisher misses many, many fish.

With nymph fishing you need to do everything you can to increase your odds of hooking fish. Fishing a short line is one of the best and easiest ways to do it. By short I mean a cast of

Photo by Rick Hafele



With a short cast you are able to keep most if not all your fly line off the water allowing for much greater control and strike detection.

fifteen feet or less and ideally less than ten feet. Sometimes to reach the water you want to fish you'll have to cast further, but if you focus on fishing nymphs with short casts you'll see your success improve significantly.

If you avoid these five no-no's, I will confidently bet you Skip's next royalty check that you will out nymph-fish Dave Hughes every time!

Good luck and Happy Casts!



Photo by Dave Hughes

Whether you are fishing nymphs or dries, it always pays to take a little time to think and observe before you start fishing. Unfortunately not every stream has a "think station" like this one.